

Wesley United Methodist Church

September 8, 2013

"What's the Plan?"

Luke 14:25-33

Here's a story about a guy named Bob. Bob was single and lived with his father. Bob worked in the family business, a very successful family business. When it became apparent that his father would not live much longer, and that he would soon inherit quite a fortune, Bob decided to find a wife with whom to share his soon-to-be abundant wealth.

One evening, at an investment meeting, Bob spotted the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. Her natural beauty took his breath away. "I may look like just an ordinary guy," he said to her, "but in just a few years, my father will die and I will inherit \$200 million."

Impressed, the woman asked for his business card. Three days later, this beautiful woman became Bob's stepmother.

There is a woman who had a plan for success. Everybody needs a plan in today's fast changing world though marrying a wealthy widower may not work for everybody. But the world is changing and we need to be prepared.

In his book, *No More Dreaded Mondays*, Dan Miller tells about many of the changes that are taking place in the American workplace. He enumerates the many jobs being lost because of technology or as the result of foreign competition. You already know this, but it's still shocking when you're confronted with the harsh reality of it all. Did you realize as you pick up your cash at your bank's ATM that these convenient devices are doing the work of 179,000 former bank tellers? It makes life easier for the rest of us, but those are nice people losing their jobs.

Even with the continuing problems of the U.S. Postal Service, did you know that sight recognition machines have replaced 47,000 postal workers? That's startling, but it is a phenomenon faced by an increasing number of workers.

As for foreign competition, did you realize that many apparel workers and financial analysts have been coerced into training their foreign counterparts who will work for a fraction of the hourly wage expected in America?

The world is changing. None of us can count on lifetime security from a job anymore. So we better be prepared. I know most of you are retired, however, many people are losing well-paying jobs and having to settle for careers in lower paying situations. Some counselors are telling us that today's workers, particularly younger workers, need to think like entrepreneurs. We need to take responsibility for our own careers and not leave that to our employers.

Making a living has always required diligence. Jesus knew what it took to succeed in the world. We forget that for about half of his life he was a carpenter. Today's story from Luke reflects Jesus' business background. There were many who were starting to follow him. Did they know what they were getting into? Unbridled enthusiasm has its place, but it must be tempered with reason. So Jesus uses an analogy. "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay a foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.'"

Jesus then moved to another analogy. "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples." Jesus was stating a solid

spiritual principle in practical and recognizable terms. People fail in business. People also fail in life. And the reasons are often the same.

Someone said sadly, "I started out on the theory that the world had an opening for me. I was right. Today, I'm in a hole." We know what he was talking about, don't we? For the person who does not sit down and count the costs whether building a tower or conducting a military campaign or building a life can find himself or herself deep in a hole. Successful living begins with a plan. It is amazing how many people fail to plan. The old saying is true: people who fail to plan, plan to fail.

How much time did or do you spend planning for the future? Some people spend more time planning for a vacation than they do planning for their life. We are so busy with so many things in our lives, we may not even think about the things that really matter. I want to ask you two questions that all of us must answer at some time or another.

Let's begin here: what kind of legacy do you hope to leave to those you love and to the world? One of these days you will be leaving this earth. How will people remember you? In what ways will the world be a better place because you've been here?

Stephen Covey in his *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* suggests that we begin with the end in mind. If you were to die tomorrow, what would you leave behind? Which of your values would you want to pass on to your heirs? Are you living out those values right now? When you get to the end of your life, will you do so with a lot of regrets? What will your friends say about you? Your family? Will you have the resources to meet the challenges of your final years, not only financial resources? Those are big questions, but they must be answered if we are going to have anything close to a successful life.

In 1962, Clare Boothe Luce, one of the first women to serve in the U.S. Congress, offered some advice to President John F. Kennedy. "A great man," she told him, "is a sentence." Abraham Lincoln's sentence was: "He preserved the union and freed the slaves." Franklin Roosevelt's sentence was: "He lifted us out of a Great Depression and helped us win a world war." Luce feared that Kennedy's attention was so splintered among different priorities that his sentence was becoming a muddled paragraph.

As you contemplate your purpose for being, your plan for life, begin with the big question: "What's your sentence?"

Former pro football great Bubba Smith came face-to-face with his sentence many years ago, and he didn't like it. Do you remember Bubba? He first came into prominence at Michigan State University as an All-American defensive end. The first selection of the 1967 NFL Draft, he played nine years in the pros. He was named to two Pro Bowls and was a First-Team All-Pro in 1971.

After football, Smith was recruited to appear in commercials for Miller Lite beer. He and fellow NFL veteran Dick Butkus were cast as inept golfers and polo players in the TV spots. In one of the most memorable ads, Smith recited the virtues of the beer, beaming into the camera, "I also love the easy-opening cans," while ripping off the top of the can.

But Smith walked away from the job because he didn't like the effect drinking had on people and he realized that he was contributing to a significant social problem. In a magazine article about his life, Bubba Smith said that neither beer nor any other alcoholic beverage had ever been part of his life. But he advertised Lite beer and felt good about his job. It was an easy job. It was an enjoyable job, it paid a good salary.

Until one day when he went back to Michigan State, his alma mater, as the Grand Marshal of the Homecoming Parade. As he was riding in the limousine at the head of the parade, he heard

throng of people on both sides of the parade route shouting. One side was shouting "Tastes great!" and the other side was shouting, "Less filling!" the slogans Miller Lite used to promote their products. Bubba Smith suddenly realized that he and the beer commercials that he made had had a tremendous impact on the students at Michigan State.

Later, Bubba was in Ft. Lauderdale during Spring Break, and he saw drunken college kids up and down the beaches, shouting "Tastes great! Less filling!" And when it came time to renew his contract, he refused to sign because he said that he didn't want his life to count for something like that. He said that there was a still, small voice in his mind that kept saying, "Stop, Bubba. Stop." Bubba Smith didn't want the sentence he would leave as his legacy to be "Tastes great! Less filling!" So he walked away.

What sentence will one day summarize your life? "He was a great father." "She kept a spotless home." "He had a bad temper." "She wore the cutest outfits." "She loved all her children." "He or she was a genuine follower of Christ."

Jesus was addressing people who were considering becoming his disciples. He wanted them to understand what was involved. He didn't need half-hearted saints. He wanted people who were willing to leave everything they considered important if that were ever needed in order to follow him. Would you measure up to that standard?

What will be your legacy? What one sentence would you want to define your life? Are you living right now so that that legacy may be achieved? "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?...Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples."

What is your plan for life? Are you living according to that plan today?